

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8171
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CONFIDENTIAL CARACAS 5163

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS VE
SUBJECT: RUMORED DISCONTENT AMONG VENEZUELAN ARMED FORCES

SUMMARY: FORMER PRESIDENT CALDERA'S RECENT WARNING AGAINST "ATTACKS ON DEMOCRACY" LED AD PARTY AND NATIONAL CONGRESS PRESIDENT BARRIOS TO DECLARE MAY 15 THAT RELATIONS WITH THE VENEZUELAN MILITARY ARE "NORMAL." EMBASSY IS PREPARING AN ASSESSMENT OF RUMORS OF INCREASING DISCONTENT AMONG THE VENEZUELAN ARMED FORCES. END SUMMARY

1. IN AN ADDRESS TO A COPEI PARTY CONVENTION ON MAY 14, FORMER PRESIDENT RAFAEL CALDERA WARNED AGAINST THREATS TO DEMOCRACY IN VENEZUELA. HE CALLED UPON THE POLITICAL PARTIES TO JOIN IN FIGHTING ADMINISTRATIVE CORRUPTION, BUT ADDED THAT, EVEN IF CORRUPTION DOES EXIST, THIS SHOULD NOT SERVE AS A PRETEXT FOR "DEALING A DEATH BLOW" TO THE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM. SAID CALDERA, "IF THERE IS CORRUPTION IN A DEMOCRACY, THERE IS MORE CORRUPTION IN A DICTATORSHIP."

2. CALDERA'S STATEMENT WAS DIRECTED SPECIFICALLY AGAINST THE CONTENTION OF THE RULING ACCION DEMOCRATICA PARTY THAT THE PRESENT AD GOVERNMENT REPRESENTED THE "LAST HOPE" FOR DEMOCRACY IN VENEZUELA AND WAS PART OF A LARGER APPEAL TO COPEI TO BECOME A VIGOUOUS OPPOSITION IN THE INTEREST OF PRESERVING THE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM.

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3. RESPONDING TO A JOURNALIST'S QUERY ON MAY 15, AD AND NATIONAL CONGRESS PRESIDENT GONZALO BARRIOS DECLARED THAT "THERE IS NO REASON TO THINK THAT RELATIONS WITH THE MILITARY ARE NOT NORMAL." HE ASKED THE JOURNALIST TO REFER HIS QUESTIONS TO CALDERA DIRECTLY. BARRIOS ADDED THAT CALDERA'S WARNING HAD NOT BEEN A TOPIC AT PRESIDENT PEREZ'S MAY 15 REGULARY BREAKFAST WITH AD PARTY LEADERS.

4. COMMENT: CALDERA'S WARNING, AND BARRIOS' DENIAL, HAVE BROUGHT OUT INTO THE OPEN RUMORS WHICH HAVE BEEN CIRCULATING THAT DISCONTENT WITHIN THE MILITARY AGAINST THE PEREZ GOVERNMENT IS INCREASING. THE EMBASSY IS CURRENTLY PREPARING AN ASSESSMENT OF THE VARIOUS RUMORS CURRENTLY CIRCULATING HERE CONCERNING MILITARY DISCONTENT WITH THE PRESENT VENEZUELAN GOVERNMENT, BUT OUR PRELIMINARY VIEW IS THAT THERE IS NO CURRENTLY FORESEEABLE PROSPECT FOR A MILITARY TAKEOVER.

SHLAUDEMAN

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Margaret P. Grafeld
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